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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: TRADE UNIONS REFUSE "EXCLUSIVE" AGREEMENT WITH SMER

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[11.](#) (U) Summary. Delegates to the Fifth KOZ Congress on November 12 and 13 rejected a proposed agreement with the opposition party Smer for closer cooperation on common goals. The tone of the program was extremely critical of the government and a high-ranking GOS official's address received boos and hollers from the participants. The delegates re-elected the KOZ leadership that has been at loggerheads with the government, which led to the recent repeal of the Tripartite Law. End Summary.

KOZ Delegates Refuse Smer Agreement  
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[12.](#) (U) On November 12 and 13, the Confederation of Trade Unions (KOZ), a federation of unions from various industries, held its fifth congress to elect its executive board and discuss future initiatives. Although the Chairman of the opposition party Smer ("Direction") Robert Fico met with great applause at the congress, the delegates declined to support a proposed cooperation agreement. Members voted to continue working with Smer, but not at the exclusion of other parties with similar platforms. Participants also recalled the suspended relations between a single political party and KOZ during the Meciar era. The Deputy Speaker of Parliament, HZDS leader Viliam Veteska, and Communist Party (KSS) Chairman Jozef Svec were also in attendance.

Saktor Maintains Leadership of KOZ  
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[13.](#) (U) KOZ President Ivan Saktor, who ran unopposed for re-election, retained the leadership of KOZ even though the confederation suffered several failures under his watch. Over the past several years, KOZ has lost nearly 300,000 members. The organization spearheaded a signature drive for the April 2004 referendum on early elections, which failed due to lack of voter participation. The government repealed the Tripartite Law, removing KOZ's status as a partner in social dialogue, stating that the political nature of the confederation and its heightened criticism of the GOS reform program hindered the tripartite process. Saktor's close collaboration with Smer leader Robert Fico may have hastened the government's decision.

KOZ Leadership Calls for Revenge  
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[14.](#) (SBU) The congress featured an unbalanced film about protest activities and events since the last congress that was highly critical of the government. The movie was accompanied by an appeal from Saktor for "vengeance, revenge, and payback" because of the negative impact of reforms on workers and unfulfilled governmental promises. When PM Dzurinda appeared on the screen, delegates of the congress booed and whistled. The president of the Association of Town and Villages (ZMOS) Michael Sykora told poloffs that KOZ has made a big mistake in vehemently attacking the government and putting in place more obstacles to future cooperation.

[15.](#) (U) Education State Secretary Frantisek Toth, one of the few government officials present, asked to address the wound-up crowd. He stated that he disagreed with some KOZ policies, but stressed that a dialogue needs two partners. Toth stated, "It is important to teach those who are hungry how to catch a fish, rather than let them simply protest that they are hungry." The public booed his speech and loud applause forced him to hastily conclude his comments. KOZ President Saktor noted the courage he displayed in making a presentation to this audience.

[16.](#) (SBU) Comment: The KOZ gathering did little to dispel the GOS impression that KOZ has become more of a political organization than one truly representing workers' rights. Smer might be disappointed at the missed opportunity for "exclusive" support from the labor unions, especially after having cooperated closely on the signature drive for early elections early in 2004. However, with KOZ membership falling rapidly, the organization would certainly lose members loyal to other opposition parties if it did not keep those doors open.

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